



# The Disabled Rambler

The Newsletter of the Disabled Ramblers

January 2006

A charitable company : Registered Charity No. 1103508

## 'By All Reasonable Means'

Readers of the 'Disabled Rambler' Newsletter will already have noted the concerns expressed by our Executive Committee about continuing delays within the Countryside Agency in the production of long awaited guidance to Countryside Managers and Highway authorities on how to open up more of the Countryside for disabled visitors. A first attempt to produce such a document in 2004 was deferred following vociferous opposition from some quarters, including a number of national disability organisations and the Fieldfare Trust.

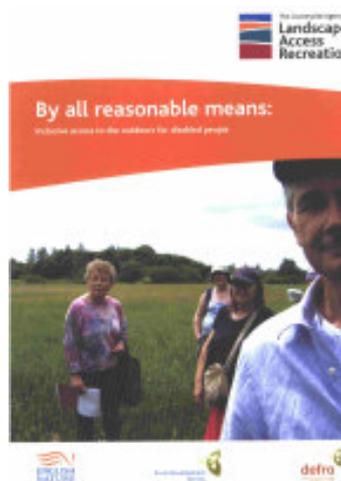
Following this, the Countryside Agency reworked the original document with the help of the Sensory Trust, and, at last, the finished work has been published and is available both on the Internet, and in printed form, available free of charge, from the CA Publications Department, based in Wetherby, West Yorkshire. It is entitled 'By All Reasonable Means', consists of just 52 pages, and is very readable.

Its purpose is to lay out an approach for countryside and urban greenspace managers and landowners to both encourage and enable them to achieve better access and is designed to cover all types of Countryside including sites, paths and trails, including the public rights of way networks.

The guide builds upon previously published work, including the Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines, originally sponsored by BT and now owned by the Fieldfare Trust, and the CA sponsored studies carried out by Alison Chapman, published under the evocative names 'Sense and Accessibility' and 'Paths without Prejudice'.

Broadly, the BT sponsored work is very comprehensive and particularly appropriate in developed settings, whereas the Alison Chapman documents deal specially with less developed routes and trails, such as the National Trails.

Recent legislation, both the CROW (Countryside and Rights of Way) Act 2000 and the DDA (Disability Discrimination Acts) of 1995 and 2005 are relevant, and aspects of access by disabled people are informed by both sets of law. It is recognised that the case for access is informed by what constitutes 'reasonable access' in the less developed countryside settings, and it is expected that case law will be built over time.



The Disabled Ramblers see 'reasonable access' in the countryside in very different terms to that in town, and we feel that disabled visitors to less developed places need to some extent to make special efforts to get about in such places. We also believe that developed and well visited sites need a higher standard of access provision, including easy access to adapted toilets, good car parking and refreshment facilities.

This distinction is very well made in the new CA document, which has taken on board the concept of 'Zones' and 'Zoning'. Three levels of 'Zone' are defined, 'A', 'B' and 'C'. Zone A corresponds to a set of guidelines published in 'Countryside for All', Zone B represents an intermediate level of access, and Zone C is for thoroughly equipped, supported and adventurous disabled people. In very broad terms, 'Zone A' is close to our 'easy' ramble category, 'Zone B' matches our 'moderate' category and 'Zone C' would represent our 'challenging' type. It is fair to say that of the 1,100 miles covered so far on our rambles, perhaps 50 miles only could be classified as 'Zone A', with the vast majority being 'Zone B' and a smaller part 'Zone C'. Miles of trail already exist within a 'Zone B' category including Forest roads and the Sustrans off-road Cycle Network.

Mike Bruton

*(Copies of the report may be downloaded from the Countryside Agency web-site: [www.countryside.gov.uk](http://www.countryside.gov.uk) or printed copies may be obtained, free of charge, from the Countryside Agency Publications Department, PO Box 125, Wetherby, West Yorkshire, LS23 7EP. Tel 0870 120 6466. Document name: 'By All Reasonable Means', reference: CA 215)*

## Letter from Mike Bruton, Chairman of the Disabled Ramblers

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Management Committee I send Greetings to all our Disabled Rambler members and friends for the 2006 New Year. I hope you will all have a happy and successful year and that you will be able to enjoy many visits to the Countryside either independently or as participants in one or more of our organised and supported rambles.

Our programme of summer rambles for 2006 is well advanced, and will be finalised early in February, when we issue our annual leaflet and booking form, as part of our membership renewal processes. In the meantime our preliminary programme can be viewed on our web-site. For those without access to the web, we have enclosed our latest preliminary plan with this Newsletter. I hope to meet many of you on rambles during the season.

We are introducing a number of new locations into this coming year's programme. As part of our visit to Wales, we are visiting the Brecon Beacons National Park after an absence of several years. On our way to Pembrokeshire in mid-June, we are planning two days in beautiful countryside near Brecon city, with two 'moderate' rambles in nearby places. Later, in July, we are planning a first visit to Lancashire, with up to three days in the Forest of Bowland area. Our final new area is rugged Dartmoor, deep in Devonshire, again up to three days, with two 'moderate' day rambles and an optional 'challenging' day.

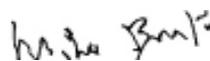
We are also hoping to be involved in two special celebration days: the first on May 13<sup>th</sup> on the North York Moors, when the project to cater specially for disabled visitors is due to come to a formal end, and the second on July 13<sup>th</sup> when we hope to celebrate the opening of a new circuit of Upper Derwent and Howden reservoirs in the Peak District.

We very much want to hear from YOU, members and friends. Please write or email us with articles for publication, your views and queries. These ventures are for you, and we need your contributions !

Please email to: [mike@thebrute.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:mike@thebrute.freeserve.co.uk), or write to: The Disabled Ramblers, 14 Belmont Park Road, Maidenhead, Berks SL6 6HT on any subject.

You can also phone Mike Bruton on: 01628 621414

Signed



Mike Bruton  
Chairman,  
The Disabled Ramblers  
Charity no: 1103508  
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### Caledonian Challenge - The Extra Challenge

Last year in June 2005 I took part in the Extra Challenge. For those of you who have never heard of the Caledonian Challenge let me explain. The State Street Caledonian Challenge is perhaps the most challenging yet rewarding fundraising event of its kind. Teams of four, each representing companies or simply as an individual team, from throughout the UK and beyond, walk 54 miles of the West Highland Way within a 24-hour period, passing through some of Scotland's most spectacular scenery. The Extra Challenge is open to participants with a medical condition or disability that prevents them from taking part in the longer event. The Extra Challenge participants had the opportunity to share in part of the route and camaraderie of its big brother.

Did you watch "Beyond Boundaries"? If you did what were you thinking? Were you, like me, wondering what YOUR boundaries would be? For those of you who didn't watch it, this was a TV series showing the efforts of a group of disabled people traversing Central America and coping with jungle, desert, water and a volcano. The Extra Challenge takes place nearer home and is not so extreme. However, it offers a challenging day out on the beautiful Scottish hills and might be more to your liking AND more attainable.

Why not join in next year, for the 2006 Extra Caledonian Challenge on 17<sup>th</sup> June?

More information from:  
[www.caledonianchallenge.com/extra](http://www.caledonianchallenge.com/extra)  
Fiona Lindsay on 0131 524 0350  
Eva.McCracken 01592 758149  
Heather Macdonald 0131 468 0110

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## A Challenging Day on Exmoor

July 8th 2004 was said to be the coldest July day on record with north-easterly winds making it like mid-winter. On this day we met in a car park high on Exmoor. There were six disabled ramblers who prefer 'challenging' routes, plus carers, plus five of us from the Mendip Ramblers to accompany and help when needed.

The disabled participants have fantastically robust electric buggies to ride over the rough terrain. Most are four-wheeled, but one is three-wheeled, with a range of 20 miles. They also need either a car with a trailer or a van with ramps to carry the buggy. Some of the vehicles have quite complicated mechanics to get the buggy and the disabled person in and out! One reminded me of Wallace & Grommit when he slides from bed to table, dressing 'en route'. I thought I had travelled quite a way (55 miles) to get there, but while some lived in Somerset, others had travelled from Guildford, Oxford, Hemel Hempstead and Southampton. This illustrates how much these rambles mean to the disabled participants, to travel so far to take part.



It started off wet .....

Well wrapped up (including one with hot-water bottles) we set off at 11.00am along an open track in a north-easterly direction. Once over the brow of the hill, the wind was less strong and we walkers began to warm up. We turned east towards Badgworthy. There were puddles across the track (some 3 inches deep) which the buggies splashed through (like children who jump in puddles), while we walkers went onto the moorland alongside. Most of the way the track had a hard surface, fine for buggies. As we dropped down through trees towards Badgworthy Water, there was a step in the track that the four-

wheelers needed help to get over. The three-wheeler managed this quite easily, but later on got totally stuck on a rock, with only one wheel on the ground. It took four or five people to manhandle the buggy before it was able to proceed.

After the descent, and a rest, we followed the track alongside Badgworthy Water towards Malmsmead. One of the buggies had a flat tyre, but fortunately another member carried a pump so the tyre was pumped up. We were now sheltered from the wind by the trees and the sun was out and shining on the water as it rushed over and around the rocks. We continued passing through fields of sheep, at which point we put our accompanying dogs on leads and the helpers had to hold them as the buggy drivers couldn't. The dog I held wanted to be at the front, although its owner was at the back, and it kept pulling on the lead. The track ended at the road by Lorna Doone Farm, where we stopped for lunch.

After lunch and pumping up the flat tyre, we set off briefly along a road going west before branching off onto a track leading back to our start point. The tyre needed two further pumps to get back to the car park, but we all arrived safely, if somewhat wind-blown, by 4.15pm, having rambled for 7 - 8 miles.. This is my third year of helping and I look forward to going again next year.



..... but it turned out fine - in the end !

I am really grateful to the Inland Revenue for allowing me special leave for this volunteer's day to help in the community.

Hilary Malpus, Ramblers Association, Somerset Area B

(Editor's note: we are most grateful for this article from Hilary. We have shortened it to describe just one day of a two day trip to save space)

## Blackburn with Darwen Tramper Project

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council aims to widen access to the countryside for disabled users. With support from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund six electric off-road scooters have been purchased and are available to hire for a minimal charge. The project will open up access to the countryside for people with mobility impairments who have difficulty getting out.

By booking in advance participants can collect a Tramper from Witton Country Park Visitor Centre and explore the fully signposted routes which have seen remedial works undertaken to ensure access. Training will be provided plus maps and mobile phones offering added reassurance. The service costs £3 and can be booked by calling the Visitor Centre on Tel: (01254) 55423. Tramper scooters are also available for hire at a nominal charge to groups offering organised walks or outings, a fully refundable deposit may be required.

### Help needed !!

Volunteers are sought to maintain the valuable Tramper service to customers. A position is available which is based at Witton Country Park and is of a clerical and training nature. For more information on Trampers, or becoming a volunteer, please contact the visitor centre on Tel: (01254) 55423.

The Tramper Project operates with financial support from Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council Neighbourhood Renewal Funding.



Graham Carter from the Blackburn and District Access Group (and Lancashire Access Forum) riding a Tramper up to Darwen Jubilee Tower above Darwen in the West Pennine Moors

## North Wales Ramble 2005



Sketch by Val Iliffe of the Mawddach Trail ramble lunch stop on a very hot day in July.  
(See page 8 for a map of the route)

## Windsor Great Park Ramble 2005

For those of you who took part in the Windsor ramble, you may be interested in the following information about the Totem Pole, supplied by a local historian, and kindly sent in by RD Boyle of Windsor.

From the top downwards the totem pole represents:

- Man with large hat
- Beaver
- Old Man
- Thunder Bird
- Sea Otter
- The Raven
- The Whale
- Double Headed Snake
- Halibut Man
- Cedar Man

Each figure represents the mythical ancestor of a clan. The totem pole is 100ft high (a foot for every year) to mark the centenary of British Columbia being proclaimed a crown colony by Queen Victoria on the 19th November 1858. The designer and principal carver was Chief Mungo Martin of the Kwankivtl (Federation of Tribes and Clans in the northern part of Vancouver Island. The pole is a single log of western red cedar and weighs 27,000 pounds (just over 12 tons) and it came from the forests of Queen Charlotte Islands. It was erected by the 3rd Field Squadron of the 22nd Field Engineers Regiment - Royal Engineers in June 1958 and the ceremony on the 19th July 1958 was attended by Queen Elizabeth II.

## The Boat of your Dreams ?

One of the factors which make rambling by electric powerchair or buggy so attractive is the near silence and lack of pollution associated with electric mobility. In my experience we are universally welcomed during our rambles, by able bodied passers-by, who often stop for a chat and to congratulate us on our adventurous spirit! I am sure both our enjoyment and our acceptability to others would be gravely jeopardised if we used noisy and polluting petrol engines.



Boris Johnson MP talks to Mike Bruton at the launch ceremony

A few years ago, I went for a trip on the Norfolk Broads using a rented day-boat. I found my enjoyment very much diminished by the smell of exhaust fumes and the racket made by the engine. I wanted to cruise in silence, particularly to enjoy the animals and birds that populate the Broads and the river banks along the route, but this pleasure was largely denied me.



Mike Bruton boards the boat the easy way .....

I think I have discovered the answer! A few weeks ago I was invited to attend the official launch of a new disabled accessible boat, powered by an electric outboard engine marketed by a company based at Goring on Thames called the 'Thames Electric Launch Company'.

This company is the longest established supplier of electric and diesel/electric boats in the UK.



..... and the hard way !

They already market and operate a range of electrically powered boats and they have now taken a far sighted decision to introduce a newcomer to their range, called the 'Mobiboat', designed to be accessible to wheelchair and some scooter users.

I attended the launch in the company of Boris Johnson MP, the well known Member for Henley-on-Thames. True to form, Boris delivered a humorous speech before bravely setting out with an elderly lady wheelchair user on a trial trip on the Thames. I also tried out the boat, quite alone, and I found it a marvellous experience. The only sound was a lapping of waves against the hull and I was quite alone amidst a flight of Canada Geese. A very therapeutic experience. Loading was via a ramp in the prow of the boat.



There's nothing like .... 'messaging about on the river !'

If you want an electric boat experience, try out this company! The Mobiboat can be purchased and towed behind a car.

(Contact: The Thames Electric Launch Company, PO Box3, Goring-on-Thames, Berkshire. RG8 0HQ. Tel: 01491 873126. web-site: [www.thameselectric.com](http://www.thameselectric.com) )

## Winter Activities for the Disabled

Having enjoyed a variety of challenging activities before becoming disabled in 1996, I subsequently looked for replacements, and disabled skiing is one I have enjoyed for a few years now. I had skied regularly before breaking my leg on the slopes in 1981, and rather lost my nerve after that.

But disabled skiing seemed an exciting winter option offered by a number of organisations such as 'Uphill Ski Club', and involves a method of skiing where one sits in a 'bucket' on one ski, supported by two outriggers (small hand controlled skis). So at least the centre of gravity is a bit lower than with normal skiing, which makes falling a bit less frightening!

You don't have to have any previous experience, but with most people assistance is necessary, and available. A very fit friend or relative might cope, but it is more practicable to go with a group, where assistance is provided. This is usually necessary for help in getting up again after taking a plunge, and for coping with the ski lifts. A loop method attaches the skier to a drag or anchor lift, with a pull to release at the top, while a heave gets the skier plus "bucket" onto a chair lift. The operator normally stops the lift for a moment to facilitate access. So all types of ski lift can be used except single-occupancy chair lifts, of which I gather a few remain, though I haven't seen any! I've skied in this way in Avoriaz (France) and Neiderau (Austria), and the thrill of the slopes is as real as with normal skiing. The helpers and equipment are provided by the group organisers, and are often transported from one resort to another between holidays in the skiing season.



Jim with his able-bodied assistant - well wrapped up and ready to go !

The system in USA is a bit different (and more expensive in terms of air fares and insurance!). The Americans

are very well organised with regard to disabled activities; both equipment and helpers are provided locally. At Winter Park two years ago they had a wide variety of equipment to suit all tastes, and we were provided with two helpers/instructors each for most of the time. Many were people working for all sorts of companies around Denver on a system of one-day release per week or fortnight, in order to provide this assistance during the season. They also cater for blind skiers, which I have not seen in Europe. Good snow conditions are more certain in America and Canada, but the journey is a bit of an ordeal. The outward flight was helped by my being upgraded to Club Class, because I was so slow in walking to the seats right at the back of the plane that, on my way past the Club Class seats, they decided that I might as well sit there, as the plane was about to take off. Apart from one day of rain at Avoriaz, the European snow has proved satisfactory or good, and I've opted for Villars this year.

Another winter activity I've tried is tall ship sailing for the disabled with the Jubilee Sailing Trust, on the 'Lord Nelson' in the Canaries, over the millennium, where everyone helps in the running of the ship. It offered an excellent opportunity to get an overview of the Canaries away from the tourist scene. With temperatures about 24 degrees centigrade, it included a day's coach trip around Palma, one of the smaller volcanic islands, and the inevitable festive celebrations. It was great fun except when I was seasick, and you have to be prepared to sleep in quarters not much bigger than the average broom cupboard. Fair enough! I'm sure that when tall ships roamed the seas in earlier centuries, the sailors' quarters were even more cramped, and they didn't have lifts to take them from one deck to another!

Jim Robinson

Editor's Note: Jim has also taken part in a two and a half week rafting trip for disabled people down the Grand Canyon. Amongst the varied activities on offer during Jim's 'American Adventure' was para-gliding, and I am pleased to say that he has promised to write another article about his air and waterborne experiences for a future newsletter.

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Please contact the Newsletter Editor directly if you wish to submit an article (preferably with supporting photographs) for a future issue of the newsletter.

email to [editor@disabledramblers.co.uk](mailto:editor@disabledramblers.co.uk)  
or telephone: 01886 880145

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## Alpine Adventure - Part I

France has so much to offer the disabled Rambler – particularly the barrier-free, long distance routes through a wide range of interesting landscapes. For some years now I have enjoyed the freedom of access to the French countryside, but had never had the opportunity to try out the higher altitude routes of the French Alps. I became more interested in such a challenge when other members of the Disabled Ramblers mentioned the possible viability of a route through the Alps that was used by Hannibal about 200 B.C.

With the help of friends in Normandy and the Rhone-Alpes, we researched the likely route taken by Hannibal and his army. We found that there is no definitive route, but the strongest likelihood is that Hannibal traversed the Alps by following the Isere River from modern-day Chambéry, and then followed the Arc River through a long and very narrow valley, before crossing the present-day Italian frontier at the Col du Clapier. His journey was far from straightforward, with major diversions along the Isere River as far as modern-day Moutiers to quell marauding tribesmen.

A date for the project was set for July 2006 to provide the time necessary for the detailed planning of parts of the route that could be completed during a day, with suitable overnight accommodation (with a charging point for batteries) at the end of each stage. Consideration had to be given not only to the distance travelled, but also to the altitude gained, because of the power drain on the batteries



View of Pralognan - looking towards the Prioux Valley

The original intention was to follow, as faithfully as possible, the 125-mile long route from Chambéry to the Italian border. However, some locations in the Arc valley are very congested, with no minor roads or tracks, with space only for the main road and a railway track. Because of this restriction, long stretches of the autoroute to the Frejus Tunnel had to be constructed underground. After careful consideration, this section

of the route was ruled out because of the danger of being forced to travel along a very busy main road. The only 'safe' alternative route was from Moutiers along the Doron valley to Pralognan, and then through the Col de la Vanoise to Termignon. However, this particular section of the route passed through the Vanoise National Park, and permission had to be obtained from the relevant authorities to take my Tramper into the park. After a lengthy process, this permission was finally obtained, but the authorities would not permit me to use a section of the track that was vital if I was to reach Termignon. In order to meet the local wardens to try and resolve this issue, we decided to travel to Pralognan in August 2005 to try out the main part of this section through the Alps, and to 'have a look' at the 'forbidden' part of the route. We also liaised with the Director of the Anae Centre for disabled people in Pralognan, who provided us with very helpful advice on routes and local weather conditions in that part of the Alps.

And so it was, with the able-bodied support of our French friends, we arrived in Pralognan on 16<sup>th</sup> August – a gloriously sunny day - and booked into the local 'bed & breakfast' that we had booked for three nights several weeks earlier. The omens looked promising - but this soon changed - with my car suffering a broken rear shock absorber soon after arrival, and the weather forecast promising to be 'changeable'. Thanks to AA European breakdown cover, my car was taken to a nearby dealership for repairs, and we soon settled in to village nightlife to enjoy the local hospitality !



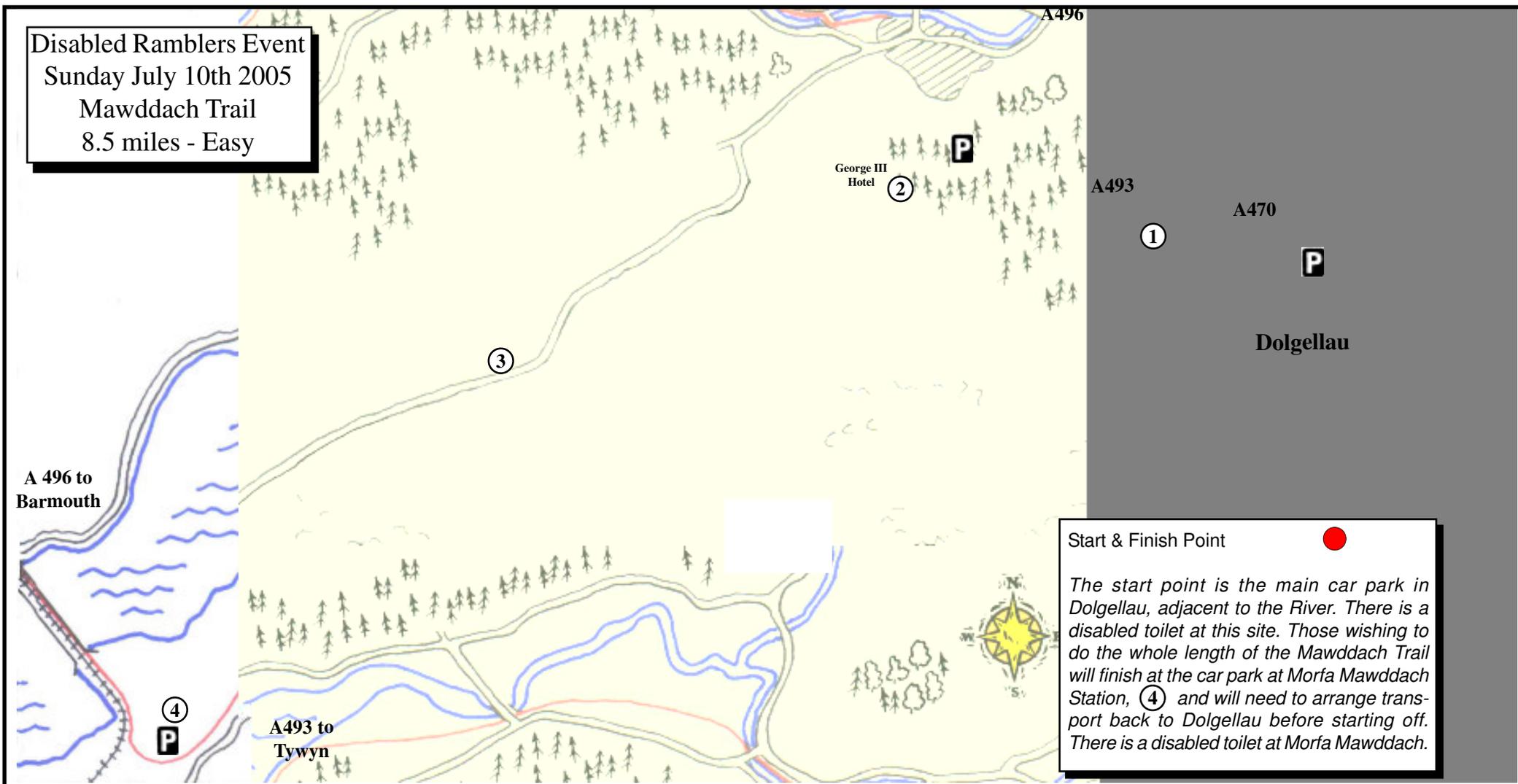
About to set off from the car park at Les Fontanettes

The day had finally arrived, and after an early breakfast, the proprietor of the B&B kindly arranged to transport us, together with my Tramper, to our start point. We got off to a chilly, but promising start – with clear skies and bright sunshine.

To be continued .....

Alan Edwards

Disabled Ramblers Event  
 Sunday July 10th 2005  
 Mawddach Trail  
 8.5 miles - Easy



**Start & Finish Point** ●

The start point is the main car park in Dolgellau, adjacent to the River. There is a disabled toilet at this site. Those wishing to do the whole length of the Mawddach Trail will finish at the car park at Morfa Mawddach Station, (4) and will need to arrange transport back to Dolgellau before starting off. There is a disabled toilet at Morfa Mawddach.

We start the ramble by taking the well-signed route for the Mawddach Trail from the Dolgellau car park, heading almost due west, with the river on our right. In about half a mile, we cross over the river by means of a footbridge and continue along the trail to Point (1). Here, we cross the A493 road and continue along the trail to Penmaenpool at Point (2). There is a disabled toilet at this site - as well as the

George III Hotel where meals and drinks are available.

There is also an interesting wooden toll bridge across the Mawddach Estuary at this point that provides vehicle and pedestrian access to the other side.

We continue travelling down the estuary, heading almost due west along the disused

railway track that continues all the way to Morfa Mawddach (4) - with fine views of the Mawddach Estuary and the rugged hills of southern Snowdonia beyond. From Morfa Mawddach it is possible to cross the estuary to Barmouth by means of a footbridge built onto the side of the railway bridge - although this is not advisable on a windy day !

Lunch can be taken at any of the picnic sites along the trail. For those not wanting to complete the whole length of the trail, a suitable point at which they can reverse the journey back to the car park in Dolgellau would be at Point (3). Otherwise, a minibus has been arranged to take drivers back to Dolgellau in order to recover their vehicles so that buggy and wheelchair users can be picked up from the finish point.